

# The Byways Scarf

A TEXTILE TALE

---

The somewhat bumpy, grey country roads that wend their way around Sweden were the inspiration for a woollen scarf, handwoven for the Capital of Culture year.

*Is there any chance of you bringing out some lovely product for sale in connection with the Capital of Culture year?*

This question, posed to Hemslöjden (Handicrafts) in Östergötland, came from SHR (The National Association of Swedish Handicraft Societies).

IT WAS 1997, a year before Stockholm became the designated Capital of Culture. I was then director of handicrafts at the Hemslöjden in Östergötland and had just been involved in a joint project with clothes designer Nygårds Anna Bengtsson, to bring out a collection of clothes called Kärna (kernel/core). This collection had come about through the collaborative efforts of the shop and its staff, the County Handicraft consultant Ann-Sofie Svansbo, a group of skilled practitioners and Nygårds Anna. Kärna was based on a number of basic models, made up in a variety of materials: linen, tulle, leather and customized woollen cloth. The range was supplemented with knitted garments and a whole lot of smaller accessories to go with the garments. We wanted the materials, as far as possible, to come from Sweden, be produced by Swedish companies. The linen was woven at Leksand Weaving Mill, the white and grey lambskins were from Swedish sheep and the tulle was material

stocked in the shop, used for folk costumes.

When it came to the woollen cloth, we wanted it woven of Swedish wool and finished in Sweden. Anna wanted it to be a plain weave, woven in singles yarn. So to arrive at a decent quality, that fulling well and would take being machine woven, we sampled several different types of yarn, weaving by hand.

IN THE END, we found one we were confident about. It was the plain grey Möbelåtta from Holma-Helsingland, single-stranded. We put the cloth through a regular washing machine wash cycle to test its fulling properties. As we did not have masses of fabric, we cut it up in little bits and put them through separately. Our zig-zagged edges were not done that carefully, so when the bits came out of the machine, some edges had worked loose and the little tangled bits were then flattened out carefully and dried. We could, however, ascertain that the cloth fulling beautifully and set to producing the cloth. Saxylle-Kilsund, which unfortunately later closed down, machine wove and finished 300 metres of grey woollen cloth. The master finisher's comment was:

– That was one of the thickest qualities we have woven up here, but it came out lovely.

Some of those little tangled bits ended up with me and some with Nygårds Anna.



Above / Woollen cloth for the Kärna Collection. Below / A piece of the cloth washed in machine gave inspiration to the Byways Scarf, designed by Nygårds Anna Bengtsson.



SO THEN when the phone call came from SHR, I called Nygård's Anna and asked her if she would like to design something for the Capital of Culture year. The idea behind this venture was for a designer to collaborate with a smaller enterprise within the applied arts industry. The request went to the National Association of Handicraft Societies: they then passed the assignment on to us at Hemslöjden in Östergötland. Another of the enterprises involved was Klässbols Linen Weaving Mill, for whom Pasi Välimaa designed some damask; several other designers were enlisted for other companies. Nygård's Anna's affirmative response and the little tangled bits on the wall heralded the start of a journey towards a handwoven memento.

THE SINGLES YARN in our samples had, through the fulling, created an interesting surface. A typical characteristic of various fibres is that they try and return to their original state, given the opportunity. Where the cloth had opened out and left gaps, the twist in the yarn brought about further movement, which meant that the ends wriggled around and the cloth acquired an intriguing texture. This phenomenon was to be reproduced on a larger scale. We set up a spaced plain weave in singles grey yarn and threw in a lighter

singles. A few centimetres of dents were left empty down the middle. When this cloth was then washed, it behaved exactly as anticipated. The cloth twisted about, forming a bumpy surface with diagonal lines. Down the middle, the light-coloured weft curled up on itself and the gap closed up around a light central line. It became a single carriageway, a Byways Scarf – a tribute to Swedish country roads.

Hundreds of two metre scarves were handwoven, which included many set-ups of about ca 50 metres. Two weavers did the weaving: Maja Sundvall at Hemslöjden and Thelma Gustafsson in Västervik. All of it was then put through regular washing machine cycles and packaged up for onward despatch to the Capital of Culture's various retail outlets.

For the Hemslöjden in Östergötland, this was a big moment. Apart from the income received, it was now on the map. Two highly competent weavers demonstrated that it was possible to take on large commissions and Swedish wool benefited from the spot-on marketing.

NYGÅRD'S ANNA later produced the Byways Scarf jointly with a weaving mill in Östergötland, Björke Weaving Workshop. This too was a worthy venture, small-scale locally produced fine wool products.

